DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 110 888 CG 010 015

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TITLE Education--The Process of Becoming.
PUB DATE 24 May 75
NOTE 9p.; Speech presented at the Commencement Exercises at Edinboro State College (Edinboro, Pennsylvania, May 24, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS College Graduates; *Educational Philosophy; *Foundations of Education; Higher Education; *Self Evaluation; Speeches

ABSTRACT

In addressing the graduating class of Edinboro State College, the U.S. Commissioner of Education asks the following 10 questions to determine if the students have really become educated: (1) Do they have a salable, specialized skill they can use to earn a good living? (2) Have they learned how to learn? (3) Do they have a thirst for knowledge and a hunger for learning? (4) Can they communicate? (5) Have they developed a clear set of standards and ideals to guide their life and daily living? (6) Have they learned how to disagree without being disagreeable? (7) Have they educated their feelings, their spirit, and their inner soul? (8) What is the state of their mental health? (9) Are they economically literate? (10) Do they know themselves? (Author)

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EDUCATION -- THE PROCESS OF BECOMING *

T. H. BELL

U.S. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

I AM HONORED TO BE INCLUDED HERE TODAY IN THE CELEBRATION OF AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE IN YOUR LIFE -- GRADUATION FROM COLLEGE. I EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION TO THE DISTINGUISHED PRESIDENT OF EDINBORO STATE, DR. CHESTER T. McNERNEY, FOR INVITING ME, AND I EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION TO YOUR RELATIVES AND THE OTHERS WHO HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO ATTEND THIS COLLEGE AND TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THIS GRADUATING CLASS.

TOMORROW YOU ENTER A NEW ENVIRONMENT -- AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT HEED YOUR NEWLY EARNED DEGREE. BUT THOSE WHO ALREADY INHABIT THAT ENVIRONMENT YOU NOW APPROACH -- OUR TOTAL SOCIETY -- WILL NEVER CEASE ASKING "ARE YOU EDUCATED?" SOMETIMES THE QUESTION WILL BE ASKED IN A KINDLY WAY, SOMETIMES SUBTLY, AND SOMETIMES NOT SO SUBTLY. IT WILL BE ASKED BY PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYERS AND, IF YOU DECIDE TO BECOME EMPLOYED, IT WILL BE ASKED BY YOUR EMPLOYER MANY TIMES AND IN MANY WAYS. IT WILL BE ASKED BY FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES, BY STRANGERS, AND BY MERE ACQUAINTANCE. SOMETIMES YOU MAY EVEN ASK YOURSELF SOME OTHER QUESTIONS -- "WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME EDUCATED?" OR "HOW DO I KNOW THAT I HAVE BECOME EDUCATED?"

LET'S EXAMINE THAT LAST ONE.

IN CONVERSATION, A WISE MAN ONCE SAID TO ME: "EDUCATION IS A PROCESS, NOT A DESTINATION...EDUCATION IS THE PROCESS OF MOVING FROM COCKSURE IGNORANCE TO THOUGHTFUL UNCERTAINTY." I HOPE I DON'T DISPLAY TOO MUCH COCKSURE IGNORANCE AS I PROCEED TO HELP YOU ANSWER THE QUESTION "HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU HAVE BECOME EDUCATED?"

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* PREPARED FOR COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES AT EDINBORO STATE COLLEGE, EDINBORO, PENNSYLVANIA, MAY 24, 1975, 10:00 A.M.

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I AM GOING TO PUT 10 QUESTIONS TO YOU AND TO MYSELF. OUR INDIVIDUAL TALLY OF "YES" ANSWERS SHOULD AT LEAST HELP US TO DETERMINE HOW FAR WE HAVE ALREADY MOVED AWAY FROM IGNORANCE.

1. DO YOU HAVE A SALABLE, SPECIALIZED SKILL YOU CAN USE TO EARN A GOOD LIVING?

I THINK IT IS SAFE TO SAY THAT A FEELING OF WORTH AND DIGNITY IS MOST OFTEN ATTAINED THROUGH ONE'S WORK. THE SELF-RESPECT AND SELF-CONFIDENCE SO IMPORTANT TO ALL OF US ARE USUALLY BYPRODUCTS OF CAREER CHOICE, DISCIPLINED PREPARATION, AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN A SOCIETY THAT NEEDS AND WANTS OUR SKILLS. ALTHOUGH A SALABLE SKILL WILL NOT GUARANTEE A MEANINGFUL LIFE, IT IS PRETTY IMPORTANT IN THE ATTAINMENT OF SELF-RESPECT, SELF-CONFIDENCE, AND INDEPENDENCE.

NOW, MANY EDUCATORS WOULD QUARREL WITH INCLUDING A SALABLE SKILL IN ANY LIST OF REQUIREMENTS FOR BECOMING A TRULY EDUCATED PERSON. MANY MIGHT GRUDGINGLY PERMIT A SALABLE SKILL TO BE LISTED, BUT THEY WOULD QUARREL WITH PUTTING IT FIRST. BUT IF WE DEFINE A SALABLE SKILL BROADLY TO INCLUDE ALL USEFUL WORK, FROM THAT OF THE SKILLED CRAFTSMAN TO A VERY HIGH ORDER OF SERVICE IN ONE OF OUR TIME HONORED PROFESSIONS, THE CONCEPT, I BELIEVE, WILL BE MORE ACCEPTABLE.

IN MY VIEW, MANY YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE AN UNNECESSARILY CIRCUITOUS AND HAZARDOUS ROUTE TO ADULTHOOD SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY LACK A STRONG COMMITMENT TO THIS PRIMARY REQUISITE.

SO, I SAY, THE FIRST TEST OF A SELF-EDUCATED MAN OR WOMAN IS TO BE PREPARED TO DO USEFUL AND REWARDING WORK. WE ALL NEED MEANINGFUL WORK TO DO EACH DAY. WHETHER WE ARE POOR OR WEALTHY BEYOND THE NEED FOR ANY FURTHER INCOME, WE MUST HAVE WORK TO FIND FULFILLMENT IN LIFE.

2. HAVE YOU LEARNED HOW TO LEARN?

AN EDUCATED PERSON MUST KEEP ON LEARNING -- MUST RENEW THE BASIC STOREHOUSE OF KNOWLEDGE AND KEEP UP WITH THE TIMES. AN EDUCATED PERSON MUST BE ABLE TO GAIN NEW KNOWLEDGE FROM READING AND FROM LIFE EXPERIENCES AND APPLY THAT KNOWLEDGE TO PROBLEM SOLVING. A PERSON MUST BE ABLE TO THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT WHAT HE HAS READ, EXPERIENCED, AND LEARNED. AN EDUCATED PERSON MUST BE ABLE TO READ DIRECTIONS AND TO TEACH HIMSELF OR HERSELF. I HAVE KNOWN PEOPLE WITH A DOCTORAL DEGREE WHO COULD NOT READ THE DIRECTIONS FOR ASSEMBLING A TRICYCLE. THEY COULD NOT TEACH THEMSELVES HOW TO SOLVE A VERY SIMPLE PROBLEM.

MY SECOND TEST OF AN EDUCATED MAN OR WOMAN, THEN, IS THAT EACH MUST BE SELF-TEACHABLE -- MUST HAVE LEARNED HOW TO LEARN.

3. DO YOU HAVE A THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE AND A HUNGER FOR LEARNING?

IT IS ONE THING TO KNOW HOW TO LEARN, ANOTHER TO HAVE DEVELOPED INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY -- A RESTLESSNESS TO KNOW AND TO KEEP KNOWING. DO YOU READ FOR THE SAKE OF KNOWING? IS THE UNFOLDING DRAMA OF EACH WEEK'S EVENTS IN OUR NATION AND THE WORLD ATTRACTING YOUR CONSTANT ATTENTION? DO NEWSPAPERS, NEWS MAGAZINES, NEW IDEAS AND REPORTS IN YOUR FIELD STIMULATE YOUR THINKING? DO YOU LIKE THE QUESTION "WHAT'S NEW?" AS I SEE IT, NO ONE CAN TRULY BE EDUCATED IN THE FULL SENSE WITHOUT A QUEST TO KNOW, A DRIVING CURIOSITY.

SO, MY THIRD TEST OF AN EDUCATED MAN OR WOMAN IS THAT EACH MUST DEVELOP AN INSATIABLE THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE AND A HUNGER FOR LEARNING. THIS COMES FROM THE DISCIPLINE OF LEARNING ITSELF. IT COMES FROM A LONG PURSUIT OF SOME SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM RECORDED IN GREAT BOOKS DOWN THROUGH THE AGES.

4. CAN YOU COMMUNICATE?

ARE YOU ABLE TO SAY WHAT YOU THINK -- SAY IT EASILY AND UNDERSTANDABLY? CAN YOU EXPRESS YOUR THOUGHTS AND IDEAS IN WRITING SO OTHERS CAN UNDERSTAND CLEARLY? CAN YOU LISTEN TO OTHERS AND UNDERSTAND THEIR THOUGHTS CLEARLY? IN TODAY'S WORLD WE MUST BE LITERATE AND VERBALLY ARTICULATE. TO EXPRESS ONE'S THINKING AND BE UNDERSTOOD IS VITAL TO ALMOST EVERYTHING.

MY FOURTH TEST OF AN EDUCATED PERSON, THEREFORE, IS THAT HE OR SHE MUST BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE.

5. HAVE YOU DEVELOPED A CLEAR SET OF STANDARDS AND IDEALS TO GUIDE YOUR LIFE AND YOUR DAILY LIVING?

A TRULY EDUCATED PERSON MUST LIVE BY SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES THAT ARE IMPORTANT AND PERSONALLY SATISFYING. A PERSON MUST BE INNER-DIRECTED, NOT ALWAYS LOOKING TO THE OTHER PERSON TO SET THE TONE OR CALL THE SHOT. MANY PERSONS ARE ROOTLESS MORALLY AND IDEALLY. IT IS GOOD TO BE OPEN AND TEACHABLE AND TO LET ONE'S STANDARDS GROW WITH TRUE CONVICTION AND CONVERSION TO NEW THOUGHTS AND IDEAS. IT IS QUITE ANOTHER MATTER, HOWEVER, TO AGREE WITH EVERYONE AND TO LACK STRENGTH OF CONVICTION. A WISE MAN ONCE SAID: "HE WHO TRIMS HIMSELF TO EVERYBODY WILL SOON WHITTLE HIMSELF AWAY." WE ALL NEED A FIRM ROOTING IN THOSE BASIC IDEALS, POLITICAL VIEWS, AND PRICIPLES THAT WE HOLD TO BE GENUINE TRUTH -- TO US. WITHOUT THIS, ONE CANNOT, AS I SEE IT, EVER BEHAVE AS A TRULY EDUCATED PERSON.

SO, MY FIFTH TEST OF AN EDUCATED PERSON IS THAT HE OR SHE MUST HAVE DEVELOPED A CLEAR SET OF STANDARDS AND IDEALS BY WHICH TO LIVE.

6. HAVE YOU LEARNED HOW TO DISAGREE WITHOUT BEING DISAGREEABLE?

DO YOU RESPECT THE VIEWS OF OTHERS? DO YOU HAVE THE MATURITY TO HEAR YOUR CHERISHED VIEWS CHALLENGED WITHOUT LOSING YOUR COOL? HAVE YOU RID YOURSELF OF PREJUDICE? I HAVE KNOWN MANY Ph.D.s WHO LACKED THIS EMOTIONAL MATURITY. ONE MUST BE EDUCATED FOR TOLERANCE. WITH ALL OF THE DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM OF OUR FREE SOCIETY, WE MUST BE UNDERSTANDING AND TOLERANT.

MY SIXTH TEST OF AN EDUCATED MAN OR WOMAN, THEN, IS BASED ON THAT PERSON'S ABILITY TO KEEP HIS COOL -- TO DISAGREE WITHOUT BEING DISAGREEABLE. THIS IS PERHAPS THE FIRST TEST OF INTELLECTUAL MATURITY.

7. HAVE YOU EDUCATED YOUR FEELINGS, YOUR SPIRIT, AND YOUR INNER SOUL?

HAVE YOU LEARNED TO ENJOY FINE MUSIC, GREAT ART, GOOD LITERATURE, AND THE SOUNDS AND SIGHTS OF NATURE? A QUALITY LIFE CALLS FOR QUALITY THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS AND AN APPRECIATION FOR THE FINE THINGS AROUND US. A QUALITY LIFE CALLS FOR A BUOYANT SPIRIT, A SOMEWHAT HAPPY AND OPTIMISTIC NATURE. AN EDUCATED PERSON, AS I SEE IT, MUST HAVE LEARNED HOW TO LIVE A DEEP AND MEANINGFUL LIFE -- THE KIND OF LIFE THAT BRINGS BOTH SERENITY AND JOY TO PERSONALITY.

THUS, MY SEVENTH TEST OF AN EDUCATED PERSON IS BASED ON LEARNING HOW TO LIVE AND APPRECIATE LIFE. TO LIVE A LIFE OF RICH DEPTH AND TOTAL FULFILLMENT, WE NEED THIS DIMENSION IN OUR SELF-REALIZATION.

8. WHAT IS THE STATE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

DO YOU LIVE WITH REALITY? ARE YOU POSITIVE IN YOUR THINKING? IS YOUR OUTLOOK UPLIFTING AND WHOLESOME?

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO BE FREE AND HOW TO ENJOY FREEDOM? SOME PEOPLE LIVE AS PRISONERS IN A FREE LAND BECAUSE THEY ARE SLAVES TO THEIR HABITS, TO THEIR FEARS, AND TO A TENDENCY TOWARD PARANOIA IN THEIR OUTLOOK.

MY EIGHTH TEST OF AN EDUCATED MAN OR WOMAN IS, THEREFORE, THE STATE OF THE PERSONS'S MENTAL HEALTH -- THE ABILITY TO COPE WITH LIFE IN A POSITIVE, PRODUCTIVE WAY.

9. ARE YOU ECONOMICALLY LITERATE?

MANY SO-CALLED EDUCATED PERSONS HAVE NEVER LEARNED THAT THEY CAN'T SPEND MORE MONEY THAN THEY HAVE COMING IN EACH MONTH. THEY HAVEN'T LEARNED HOW TO AVOID PERSONAL ECONOMIC DISASTER. AN EDUCATED PERSON MUST BE ECONOMICALLY LITERATE. HE OR SHE MUST KNOW HOW TO MANAGE MONEY AS WELL AS EARN IT. IT'S NOT SO MUCH THE AMOUNT ONE EARNS AS IT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT ONE EARNS AND WHAT ONE SPENDS THAT DETERMINES ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE. AN EDUCATED PERSON HAS LEARNED THE SIMPLE LESSONS OF PERSONAL MONEY MANAGEMENT AND HOW TO APPLY THEM.

MY NINTH TEST OF AN EDUCATED PERSON IS BASED, THEN, ON KNOWING HOW TO LIVE WITHIN ONE'S MEANS.

10. DO YOU KNOW YOURSELF?

CAN YOU APPLY WHAT YOU KNOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH? CAN YOU CONTROL YOUR APPETITES AND YOUR PASSIONS?

WITHOUT GOOD HEALTH, ALL ELSE WILL SEEM OF LITTLE USE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO APPLY WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT PRESERVING HEALTH. IT IS OF NO AVAIL TO BE AN INTELLECTUAL GIANT AND A PHYSICAL SLOB. MOST KNOWLEDGABLE PERSONS KNOW THAT EXERCISE, PROPER NUTRITION, AND ADEQUATE REST ARE ESSENTIAL TO GOOD HEALTH. MOST OF US KNOW THAT SOME DRUGS AND OTHER ADDICTIVE HABITS WILL DESTROY OUR HEALTH. IN THE FULLEST SENSE, AN EDUCATED PERSON APPLIES HIS OR HER KNOWLEDGE IN DAILY LIVING.

SO, FINALLY, MY TENTH TEST OF AN EDUCATED PERSON IS BASED ON THAT PERSON'S ABILITY TO KNOW HIMSELF OR HERSELF AND TO HAVE A HIGH REGARD FOR PERSONAL PHYSICAL HEALTH.

THAT CONCLUDES THE LIST OF QUESTIONS I USE TO HELP ANSWER THE BIG QUESTION: "HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU HAVE BECOME EDUCATED?"

I AM NOT CERTAIN THAT YOUR COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER GETS PASSING GRADES ON ALL FACETS AND DETAILS OF THIS TEST OF AN EDUCATED MAN. BUT IF WE REGARD EDUCATION AS A PLEASANT ROAD ONE TRAVELS ON A NEVER ENDING JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE, WE NEED NOT WORRY IF WE STILL LACK THE COMPLETE FULFILLMENT OF THESE 10 KEYS TO BECOMING FULLY EDUCATED. WE SHOULD WORRY, HOWEVER, IF WE ARE NOT MOVING IN THAT DIRECTION. A WISE PHILOSOPHER WROTE: "A BAD MAN IS A MAN WHO, REGARDLESS OF HOW GOOD HE IS, IS DECLINING AND BECOMING LESS EFFECTIVE: AND A GOOD MAN IS A MAN WHO, NO MATTER HOW BAD HE IS, IS IMPROVING AND BECOMING MORE EFFECTIVE."

I HAVE FAITH IN TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE IN GENERAL, AND I HAVE FAITH IN THE MEMBERS OF THIS GRADUATING CLASS. I AM CONFIDENT THAT, REGARDLESS OF YOUR SCORE ON MY 10 QUESTIONS, EACH OF YOU IS DEEPLY INVOLVED IN BECOMING AN EDUCATED PERSON AND THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO IMPROVE AND BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE.

THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY SAID:

"PERHAPS THE MOST VALUABLE RESULT OF ALL EDUCATION IS THE ABILITY TO MAKE YOURSELF DO THE THING YOU HAVE TO DO, WHEN IT OUGHT TO BE DONE, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT. THIS IS PERHAPS THE FIRST LESSON TO BE LEARNED."

SOME OF YOU MAY HAVE LEARNED THIS IMPORTANT LESSON BEFORE COMING TO COLLEGE, AND SOME MAY HAVE LEARNED IT HERE. IF YOU HAVE NOT LEARNED IT, THE WORLD IS WAITING TO TEACH IT AS YOU LEAVE HERE. AND AS YOU STRIVE TO LEARN THIS LESSON YOU WILL BE IN THE COMPANY OF MANY ADULTS, PERHAPS EVEN SOME SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND A FEW PARENTS.

THERE ARE GOALS THAT EACH OF US MUST MEET IF WE ARE TO CONTINUE THE PROCESS OF BECOMING EDUCATED. TO LOSE SIGHT OF THESE GOALS IS TO DO A DISSERVICE TO OURSELVES AND TO THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH AND TRUST IN US, TO A NATION THAT HAS OFFERED MUCH FREEDOM AND OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO DEVELOP OUR SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES.

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS AND BEST WISHES FOR THE FUTURE. THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE WITH YOU TODAY.

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